

SAN BERNARDINO, CA - Lieutenant Governor John Garamendi, San Bernardino County Supervisors, federal, state and local officials today reviewed strategies to begin a community clean-up of fire- ravaged San Bernardino neighborhoods. Garamendi brought together state and local experts who coordinated debris removal after the devastating Angora fire in South Lake Tahoe this past June to outline for San Bernardino County officials the successful steps undertaken to speed fire recovery and enable the South Lake Tahoe community to begin rebuilding.

“After a devastating disaster, homeowners face the daunting challenge of cleaning up their properties before they can begin rebuilding their lives,” said Lt. Governor Garamendi. “The successful community clean-up effort undertaken after the Angora fire offers homeowners, insurers, and state and local agencies a streamlined approach that saves time, money, and headaches in the critical weeks ahead.”

“The victims of this fire have suffered immensely as a result of this disaster,” said San Bernardino Supervisor Paul Biane. “Yet in spite of these dramatic losses, and the difficult weeks and months ahead, Californians are coming together, working together and preparing to rebuild communities together.”

Following the South Lake Tahoe fires, State and County officials orchestrated a successful, coordinated clean-up effort which cleared hazardous debris from all burned properties within 40 days, a dramatic improvement from previous disasters where clean-up has taken months. The coordinated effort allowed fire survivors to achieve the first step in the rebuilding process quickly, efficiently and safely.

“I am pleased to see that San Bernardino local officials, along with federal and state leaders, are working together to develop a community effort which would save time, money and curb fraud,” said San Bernardino County Supervisor Dennis Hansberger.

The community solution presented today would allow homeowners to avoid the time-intensive process of screening contractors, protect homeowners from price-gouging and potential fraud by unscrupulous contractors. Such an approach has the additional benefits of cost-effectiveness for insurers and achieving environmental quality assurances from state regulators as part of the coordinated process.

Garamendi called the meeting today to educate the local San Bernardino officials and encourage all parties to come together and begin a community effort which would allow homeowners to avoid the time-intensive process of screening contractors, protect homeowners from price-gouging and potential fraud by unscrupulous contractors. The Angora fire debris clean-up approach discussed by Garamendi has the additional benefits of cost-effectiveness for insurers, and achieving environmental quality assurances from state regulators as part of the coordinated process.

The proposed county/state debris-removal plan, modeled after the rebuilding efforts in Angora, brings property owners together and involves two phases of clean-up. Phase one brings affected residents together to sign up for a single debris-removal contract and structural debris removal begins. Phase two of the plan calls for the removal of hazardous trees in burned areas that remain a threat.

"I am moved by the speed with which all of the necessary agencies came together to rebuild the South Lake Tahoe community," said El Dorado County Supervisor Norma Santiago. "Being intricately involved in the successful debris clean-up following the recent Angora fires I believe there is no finer example of public sector service than the rebuilding efforts presented today. I am pleased to be part of a process which translates that success to the fire-ravaged San Bernardino neighborhoods."

Lt. Governor Garamendi has extensive experience in wildfire and natural disaster issues, having served as a State Senator representing mountainous areas of Northern California, including the Lake Tahoe area. Garamendi also served as the Deputy Secretary of the United States Department of the Interior during the Clinton Administration, and for eight years as California's elected Insurance Commissioner, where he fought to ensure that homeowner policies give California consumers the disaster protection they deserve. Most recently, Garamendi served as the Acting Governor when the Angora Fire broke out in South Lake Tahoe this past June.

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